CHAPTER 4

HISTORIOPHOTY

A photograph serves manifold functions. It can alter a man’s perception of the world. It can seize the spirit and character of other cultures. Photograph can even change the ethos of a nation. The photo of a young Vietnamese girl fleeing from a napalm attack helped spark America’s anti-war movement in the mid-1960s. The Afghan girl pictured on the cover of the June 1985 issue of National Geographic shed light not only on the conflict in Afghanistan but also the predicament refugees all over the world endure.

A photograph can influence one’s perception of a thing or an event. Combination of photographs makes combination of signs and ideas. So to collect photographs means to collect the world. To photograph also means to appropriate the thing photographed. A photograph stands for the incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. There is always a presumption that something exists or existed which resembles what is depicted in the photograph. Whatever be the limitations or pretensions of the individual photographer, a photograph seems to have more innocent and therefore, more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects.
Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* and Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* are the two most influential works on photography. The word photography, which is derived from the Greek words for light and writing, was first used by Sir John Herschel in 1839. Photography, ever since its invention, has been an important part of the visual culture. One of the interpretive tools used to analyze photographic images is semiotics which is also referred to as “the study of signs.” The semiotic approach takes a photographic “image apart” into parts such as iconic, indexical and symbolic signs, and “traces how it works in broader systems of meaning” (Rose 69). As a sign photograph constructs meaning. The semiotic approach offers a space where “interpretive debate among semiologists over the status of signs in photographic images” arises (Rose 82). While some semiologists believe that the signs present in every photograph are solely adequate to understand its meaning, others argue that there are some points in certain photographs that elude analysis.

Building on Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic theories, Barthes constructed his theory of semiotics which deals with the signifier, the signified and the sign. The signifier is the term used to describe the image that is being examined, and the signified is the term used to describe any idea or concept which the signifier represents and the sign is the correlation of the signifier and the signified. Barthes also noted that anything signified by the signifier is culturally specific. Signifieds have a very close contact with culture, knowledge and history; it is through them that the external world
invades the system. This suggests that whatever is being signified may change over time and space: so different people will interpret signifieds differently. For example, within Indian culture cow is perceived as a sacred animal while in the western culture cow is simply a provider of food. Since each signified is culturally specific, Barthes theory also takes into account the uses of denotation and connotation. Denotation is a literal description of the image or object being examined while connotation is the ideas associated with the image or object.

When analysing press photographs it is also important to include the caption. This is because the image and the caption are, as Barthes claims, two different structures. Barthes uses the terms anchorage and relay when he refer to the captions of press photograph. Anchorage is referred to the text within the caption directs the reader, through the signifieds, to avoid some images and receive others. Relay describes the addition of something in the caption which is not actually present in the image. Barthes also includes in his theory of semiotics the elements of myth. Myth is described as a second-order semiological system. Barthes argues that signification is divided into two different levels: connotation and denotation. Myth is signification at the connotative level. Myth sees the signifiers in its raw form.

Like signifieds, myths are divided into two categories: the language objects which form the linguistic system and myths themselves which form a metalanguage. The latter is an alternative language which deals with the first.
Barthes appropriately describes the relation between the two in the use of myth: “When he reflects on a metalanguage, the semiologist no longer needs to ask himself questions about the composition of the language object, he no longer has to take into account the details of the linguistic schema; he will only need to know its total term or global sign...” (Visual Culture: The Reader 53). When Barthes theory is applied to war, two competing myths can be attained about war. One myth is based on General William Tecumseh Sherman’s remarks: “It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood...War is hell” (“The Vietnam War, Through Eddie Adams’ Lens”). The competing myth to this is that war can be fought in a morally acceptable way. A war can be morally managed by minimising the risk to casualties and soldiers and thus reducing the political and electoral risks to their masters.

Although there are remarkable and powerful images of war that remind us of the unthinkable horrors human beings continue to suffer, it appears that we rarely learn from them. We appear fascinated by the sacrifice people endure for a cause, noble or ignoble. But most of the pictures that remind us of those sacrifices seem to be ignored. The pictures we see of dead and wounded civilians and soldiers in times of conflict become social artifacts that may or may not stir our emotions or move us to action.

The Tet Execution photograph by Eddie Adams shows the police chief General Nguyen Ngoc Loan in the process of executing a Vietcong prisoner,
Nguyen Van Lem; Lem is yet to be shot at. The three kinds of signs, according to Peirce, that can be applied to undergo a semiotic analysis of this photograph are iconic, indexical and symbolic (Rose 78). Iconic signs are characterized by likeness between the “signified” and the “signifier,” and “in indexical signs, there is an inherent relationship (physical or causal) between the “signified” and the ‘signifier’” (Rose 74). The signified is a concept or an object and the signifier refers to a sound or an image that is attached to a signified; the signified and the signifier combine together to compose a “sign.” In the Viet Cong Execution photograph, the “signifier” is the gun in the hand of the General pointed at Lem whose face clearly portrays the “signified” - fear. Therefore, the iconic and indexical signs combine to convey the meaning that Lem is about to be executed by the General. Moreover, symbolic signs have a clearly arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified. This photograph is symbolic of the Marxist view of the powerless suffering at the hands of the powerful. Thus, the Viet Cong photograph can be easily “taken apart” into signs and interpreted through the means of semiotics. When looking at the photograph, the facial expression of the man in the military uniform at the extreme left of the photograph catches our attention. He is about to witness an execution and it is unable to deduce from his face whether he is for or against the execution. Besides, there is an interesting fact about the Viet Cong photograph. According to the photographer Eddie Adams, the victim, Lem, had just murdered a South
Vietnamese colonel, his wife and their six children and therefore, the General’s act of executing Lem seemed justifiable. Eddie Adams later wrote in *Time*:

> The general killed the Viet Cong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world. People believe them, but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths. What the photograph didn’t say was, ‘What would you do if you were the general at that time and place on that hot day, and you caught the so-called bad guy after he blew away one, two or three American people?’ (17)

This remark also supports the view that, sometimes, a part of analysis may be missing in the interpretation of a photograph merely based on its signs.

There are some interpretations in some photographs that cannot be named or coded, yet they manage to leave an impression. Roland Barthes coined a term for this impression: the punctum. He contrasts “the punctum, the point,” to “the studium, or general knowledge available to every viewer” (*Visual Culture* 74). According to Barthes, studium denotes cultural, linguistic and political interpretation of a photograph based on evident signs whereas punctum denotes personally touching details of a photograph, which establish a connection with the person or the object in the photograph (*Camera Lucida* 26-7). He further states that every photograph need not
have punctum, but it does have stadium. Barthes describes studium as being “of the order of liking, not of loving” since it “mobilizes a half desire, a demi volition” (27). Elaborating further on studium, he observes:

To recognize the studium is inevitably to encounter the photographer’s intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which the studium derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. (*Camera Lucida* 27-8).

He means that stadium refers to a cultural encounter that conditions the interpretation of a photograph.

Studium, according to Barthes, can be described as present in every photograph, and is devoid of any pleasure or pain. Punctum, on the other hand, evokes a response from its viewer by “disturbing the studium” and it cannot be articulated: “The studium is ultimately always coded, the punctum is not” (51). The details in a photograph that cannot be named (or coded) constitute punctum while the details that can be named constitute studium. Barthes clarifies this when he analyses a photograph taken by Nadar:

Nadar, in his time (1882), photographed Savorgnan de Brazza between two young blacks dressed as French sailors; one of the two boys, oddly, has rested his hand on Brazza’s thigh; this
incongruous gesture is bound to arrest my gaze, to constitute a punctum. And yet it is not one, for I immediately code the posture, whether I want to or not, as “aberrant” [and, hence, is studium] (for me, the punctum is the other boy’s crossed arms). What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance [punctum]. (51)

Barthes means that punctum can only exist in a photograph, if there is no visible sign in it that can code a certain feeling or an idea that a viewer experiences on seeing that particular photograph.

In his book *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes suggests that there are two versions of punctum; “one is the casual, everyday notion of irrational preference for a particular detail in a photograph” which might be triggered as a result of the viewer’s personal experiences and memories (74). This is evident when Barthes talks about Van der Zee’s Family Portrait (1926):

Reading Van der Zee’s photograph, I thought I had discerned what moved me: the strapped pumps of the black woman in her Sunday best; but this photograph has worked within me, and later on I realized that the real punctum was the necklace she was wearing for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family, and which, once she died, remained shut up in a family box of old jewelry. (53)
According to Barthes, “sometimes, despite its clarity”, the punctum manifests itself after the photograph is “no longer in front of” the viewer (Camera Lucida 53). The second version of punctum, as described by Barthes, is “the sense in which punctum is a wound; in this instance, the photograph evokes something very powerful and unbidden in the viewer” (Camera Lucida 74). Barthes elaborates on this view when he talks about photographs in relation to the element of time: the “punctum is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of time in them: that is dead and that is going to die” (Camera Lucida 96). Thus, the punctum creates the connection between the viewers’ personal experiences and death, rendering a photograph divine.

In the Tet Execution photo the studium is that Lem is under the threat of being shot but the punctum is that he is going to die, which is a disturbing thought. Another haunting truth about this photograph is that besides Lem, the other figures present in the photograph- the General, the silent spectator on the side- are also going to die. This supports Barthes’ claim that “whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is a catastrophe” because it speaks of inevitable death (96). In brief, according to Barthes, some photographs have the ability to create a relationship between its viewer and the reality of death through punctum by generating a forceful effect in the viewer. Moreover, Barthes also introduces the concept of “shock” in photographic interpretation. Barthes says that shock is quite different from the punctum (Camera Lucida 32). He adds: “Shock can traumatize but,”
if there is “no disturbance; the photograph can “shout” not wound” as punctum would require (*Camera Lucida* 41).

It is true that most of the photographs can be comprehended using the objective tools of analysis, but there are instances when some signs in a photograph manage to leave an impact on the viewer and are overlooked by an objective analysis such as a semiotic analysis. Barthes’ concept of punctum is, therefore, relevant and key to the interpretation of photographs. Sometimes, there, is a sensitive point in an image which pricks, bruises, disturbs a particular viewer out of his viewing habits, but cannot be named (coded) according to an objective method of visual interpretation.

Even when photographers are concerned with mirroring reality, they are still driven by the imperatives of taste and conscience. In deciding how a picture should look, photographers impose standards on their subjects. Although there is a sense in which the camera captures reality, not just interprets it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are.

History is typically presented as historiography, where historians communicate through the written word, through verbal narratives. However, some historians have suggested alternative formats for communicating and thinking about historical information. One such format is known as historiophoty, which involves using a variety of visual images to represent history. In his essay “Historiography and Historiophoty,” Hayden White coins
the term “Historiophoty” to describe the representation of history in visual images and filmic discourse. White states that historiophoty “...is in contrast to Historiography which is the representation of history in verbal images and written discourse” (1194): one is verbal while the other is visual. One is a graphic discourse whereas the other is a filmic discourse.

War photography has existed since the nineteenth century, when Roger Fenton set out to photograph the Crimean war in 1855. From the beginning of war photography questions have always been raised about their representation of the truth. Compared to modern day cameras the exposure time required to take a photograph ensured that action shots were not possible. The images could only be of dead on the battlefield or posed for. This was apparent throughout Alexander Gardener’s photos of the American Civil War. The photographer, who created the book Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War, was famed for staging various shots. The image which was captioned, “The home of a rebel sharpshooter,” was proved to have been staged. Civil war experts reviewed the image revealing that Gardner had dragged the body into the shot and twisted his head towards the camera. The gun also within the image was placed strategically by Gardner.

During the Second World War the staging of photographs continued. The cameras used during this war were a significant improvement and allowed for action shots to be taken, but still the authenticity of some of the photographs was questioned. Yevgeny Khaldei’s famous photograph
of a Soviet soldier placing the Soviet Union’s flag atop of the Reichstag building in Berlin was in fact staged. The photo was taken three days after the Soviets had firstly placed a flag at the top. The image was taken at such an angle to prevent the viewing of other Soviet soldiers who were looting and the soldiers were handpicked by Khaldei.

Another photo which was staged is the most reproduced photo in the world. Jim Rosenthal’s photo of the flag rising at Iwo Jima was claimed to be “too perfect.” The image taken was not the first picture of a flag being raised. A marine photographer took the first picture of a flag being raised earlier in the day while the marine were under heavy fire. Rosenthal’s photo was taken later in the day and pictured a much larger flag. There has always been a partiality of representation in major wars simply because usually only one side is reported on by journalists representing news institutes from the same country as the army they report on.

The late photographer Eddie Adams took pictures of hundreds of celebrities and politicians- from Fidel Castro to Mother Teresa to Arnold Schwarzenegger (captured in a bathtub with a rubber duck). But some of his most searing portraits come from his work during the Vietnam War. One photo is so iconic that it is the picture most people think of when they think of Vietnam: a Vietnamese general in Saigon executing a Viet Cong suspect. But the Pulitzer Prize Adams won for this photograph left him pained and conflicted for the rest of his life.
Adams died of Lou Gehrig’s disease in 2004. His war photographs were never published in a book during his lifetime. People who knew him say the photographer had an intense desire to be perfect, so the book projects were always delayed. Now nine years after his death, *Eddie Adams: Vietnam* presents a collection of his photographs from the war.

The Vietnam War was a turning point for war photographers like Adams. According to Hal Buell of the Associated Press, no war was ever photographed the way Vietnam was, and no war will ever be photographed again the way Vietnam was photographed. There was no censorship. All a photographer had to do is to convince a helicopter pilot to let him get on board a chopper going out to a battle scene. So photographers had incredible access.

Adams’ close-up portraits and emphasis on intimate storytelling presented a new way to photograph war. One portrait shows a marine with an intense expression out in the field on the phone, perhaps calling for air support. There is a picture of soldiers coming into a village, but your eyes focus on a woman and her child trying to flee. There is a young Vietnamese man being interrogated, a spear pointed at his throat.

Former AP and CNN correspondent Peter Arnett was with Adams in Vietnam. He says that some 60 journalists and photographers were killed in Vietnam, but there were always enthusiastic young reporters and photographers eager to take their places. Arnett explains: “This was the last
great wire service war, and there was enormous competition between UPI and AP” (“The Vietnam War: Through Eddie Adams Lens”). On account of the draft, most journalists chronicling Vietnam had been in the military. They could relate to the troops and had a better understanding of what was going on. Adams, who had been a combat photographer with the U.S. Marine Corps in Korea, loved the Marines, and many of his best photographs are of Marine operations.

But Adams’s most famous and most disturbing photograph was shot on the streets of Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon. The incident took place on the second day of the Tet Offensive in 1968, a watershed battle that changed public perceptions of the war. Adams saw a soldier drag a man in a checkered shirt out of a building. In the documentary, An Unlikely Weapon: The Eddie Adams Story, Adams describes what happened: “They were taking him by the hand and pulled him out in the street,... Now any photographer, when you grab a prisoner, in New York or something, you just follow him, and it’s a picture. You follow until he is put into a wagon and driven away.” Walking into the frame of his camera was Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, raising a pistol. Normally, holding a weapon to a suspect’s head and asking questions was a method of interrogation. In this regard, Buell explains: “This man just raised the pistol and Eddie made a picture of an interrogation, but the man pulled the trigger”.

Adams’s frame was the very instant when the bullet entered the man’s head— the moment of death. The picture went around the world. It was held up at demonstrations by members intensifying anti-war movement and it became one of the iconic photos that symbolized the war for many people. Ironically, there are films of that same execution. But Buell and Arnett argue that the still photo had more impact than the films had. In this regard Buell explains: “You can see the gun, you can see the expression on the man’s face as the bullet enters his head, and you see the soldier on the left who is wincing at the thing that has happened… With the still picture, you have time to consider all the factors.” Arnett calls this picture “a brilliant piece of photography.” He adds: “He had the courage to stand a foot or two away from a murdering officer who had his pistol out and shot the man in front of him.”

But Adams, who considered himself a patriot and a Marine, never came to terms with the fact that the anti-war movement saw this photograph as proof that the Vietnam War was unjustified. In fact, he believed to the end of his life that the picture only told part of the truth. The untold story was that on the day of the execution an aid to Loan was killed by insurgents. After Loan pulled the trigger, he walked by Adams and said: “They killed many of our people and many of yours.” In the documentary *An Unlikely Weapon*, Adams stated that he found the attention given to this photo disturbing: “I still don't understand to this day why it was so important,
because I have heard so many different versions of what this picture did, like it helped end the war in Vietnam.”

The war in Vietnam has been described as the war America watched from their living rooms. Images of combat and American GIs were projected through TV screens and newspapers daily. During the war in Vietnam, the American military gave the press unprecedented freedom of access to combat zones. This allowed newspaper reporters and photographers and television crews to document a war involving Americans on the other side of the world. This willingness to allow documentation of the war was also extended to the military’s own photographers. Between 1962 and 1975, military photographers for the United States Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force took millions of photographs of the American conflict in Vietnam. Almost a quarter of a million of these images are now located at the National Archives. These photographs serve publishers, historians and students who want to learn more about Vietnam. They include images of almost every aspect of the war.

The duty of the military photographers was not only to document the war but also to capture images for the historical record. In his book *Vietnam: Images from Combat Photographers*, C. Douglas Elliott describes the images that came in from the combat operation in telling phrases: “… that did not show winners and losers. They showed soldiers- often teenagers- coping as best they could with unrelenting heat and humidity, heavy packs, heavy guns, and an invisible enemy whose mines, booby traps, and snipers could cut life
short without a moment’s warning” (quoted in “Teaching with Documents: The War in Vietnam- A Story in Photographs”). In order to capture these images, photographers took many risks and suffered many of the same hardships as the soldiers and personnel they were covering.

The operations and direction of the military photography was organized by the Army Pictorial Center (APC), which dispatched a series of teams for brief visits. These teams were organized into Department of the Army Special Photo Office (DASPO). DASPO rotated photographers into Vietnam for three-month tours of duty from a base in Hawaii. It was not long before the Marines sent their own photographers into the field, quickly followed by the Army and its 221st Signal Company. The DASPO and the 221st Signal Company were considered the Army’s elite photographic units. Smaller numbers of photographers worked for the Public Information Office (PIO), the Air Force and the Navy. The Air Force photographers assisted in aerial reconnaissance and documentation of bombing missions. The Navy photographers worked from the Combat Camera Group-Pacific (CCGPAC) photographing river patrols, counter guerrilla missions and SEAL teams. The mission of DASPO was to provide a historical record of the war for the Pentagon archives. These photographers were there not simply as journalists but rather to create a visual record of operations, equipments, and personnel. After the photographs were processed by the Pentagon, they were made
available to military publications, the press and the public at a photographic library at the Pentagon.

As these photographers worked to document the war, they covered a variety of people and circumstances including combat missions, GIs, support personnel, medical units, and visits by dignitaries, politicians and entertainers. While they may have been there to provide visual record of operations, equipments, and personnel, their photographs also tell the story of the young men and women who fulfilled their duty to their country by serving in the war in Vietnam.

The Vietnam War was defined as the “first televised war,” but it has been the still photos, the single frames, that have carved their place in history. Eddie Adams’s image of the point-blank execution of a suspected Viet Cong member on the streets of Saigon and Nick Ut’s photo of a little girl running naked down the street after being burned by napalm are two examples of “iconic” photos as defined by scholars. These iconic photos have appeared repeatedly in the media, they have been reused and repurposed by popular culture, and they appear in history books as visual representations of the war.

America entered the Second Indochina War to halt the spread of communism: to stop potential “dominoes” from falling around the world. When the French pulled out of the First Indochina War on 21 July, 1954, President Eisenhower feared that the region would fall to communism if there were not the U.S. presence in Vietnam. It was President Lyndon Johnson
who sealed America’s fate in Vietnam after the Tonkin Gulf Resolution passed through Congress in August of 1964, giving Johnson the authority to use military force in Southeast Asia without an official declaration of war. For the next ten years, the United States was stuck in Vietnam, fighting on the side of the South Vietnamese against the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (NLF). When the war finally ended on April 30, 1975, the number of casualties was astronomical for both sides. The war in Vietnam was never officially declared an American war by the U.S. Congress, but it was a brutal war nonetheless.

The photographs that emerged from the war, especially the iconic photos, were also brutal. Scholars like David Pearlmutter suggest that the public’s understanding of the circumstances captured by these photographs may be limited. If these scholars are correct, meanings that ordinary citizens attach to these iconic photographs are limited as well. These iconic photos that emerged from the Vietnam War era contribute to the collective memory of the war.

Collective memory, a term used interchangeably with public memory, social memory or popular memory, refers to recollections of the past that are determined and shaped by a group. Memory is social because people remember collectively, publically and interactively. The creation and maintenance of collective memory involves the ongoing thinking and speaking about an event by the affected members of society.
According to James Pennebaker and Becky Banasik, the Vietnam War affected collective memory because it was an important turning point in American self-views, producing a new generation of people who questioned America’s role in the world (4). The press has contributed to the American construction of collective memory, especially through the mass publication of newspapers and magazines. The role of the journalists in the construction/formation of the collective memory has been the focus of many studies. In their new role the journalists extend the cultural authority of mass media as the shapers and repository of public memory. According to Michael Schudson, cultural artifacts are dedicated memory forms, which are explicitly and self-consciously designed to preserve memories (347). Cultural artifacts and social cues prompt the act of remembering. Media serve a “warehouse” function of storage for memories. Visual records can stabilize the fleeting qualities of memory and can aid in the recall of past events. However, just as people remember, they also forget; therefore, distortion is inevitable in memory. The passage of time causes memory distortion as memories are reshaped due to the loss of detail and the loss of emotional intensity. The passage of time also allows for change of historical perspective, allowing for an understanding that may not be possible during the time of the event. In his study of generational effects on collective memory of major American events, Schuman concludes that people sometimes make judgments that reflect primarily the perspectives of historians, but it is mostly the intersection of
personal and national history that creates the most vital connection to the time period in which they live through (347). Collective memory is not necessarily linear, logical, or rational. The unpredictability of memory is a significant limitation that has stalled the study of memory. This is because these studies are unable to foresee which aspects of the past will become a part of the collective recollection.

Foreign policy can be used to manipulate mass media, but mass media can also influence foreign policy. Prior to the Vietnam War, censorship in war reporting was used to prevent the damage to the spirit on the home front as well as to prevent the opposing side from gaining significant information. Vietnam was the first war in which journalists were not subjected to official censorship for the most part because the United States government did not recognize Vietnam as an official war. "Voluntary guidelines" were implemented, creating fifteen categories of information that the press was not allowed to report on. Reporters were allowed access to almost all aspects of the front, establishing the modern precedent.

Americans were for the first time able to see images of the war on their television sets; that is why the Vietnam War is referred to as the first televised war. With the media more widespread in its coverage of Vietnam than any prior conflict, war coverage was distributed at a faster pace and was more prevalent than ever before. In January of 1968, there were 179 American journalists in Saigon reporting on the conflict. Americans saw television
coverage of the battles, the results and the repercussions of war, and they were more informed of the war by the media than any prior conflict. Television provided visuals to go along with the reports of the war in Vietnam, making the news coverage much more vivid than previous wars. Visual details are important to the perception of war. According to Shano Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, there is a different understanding between knowing and seeing Americans fighting and losing their lives in Vietnam (35). Television also has the power to direct views to certain features of the war and ignore others. There was great suffering and death in Vietnam, and the media was there to record them. The mass media had the ability to make the distinction between worthy and unworthy victims and could choose which to portray in their coverage.

In the television coverage of the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese were portrayed as cruel, ruthless and fanatical. The NLF was also portrayed through a consistent theme of terrorism, showing it as a criminal unit rather than a rival government. The journalistic coverage of Tet framed the war as slipping out of control. The American press had the power to make Tet a win or loss for the administration based on its coverage. The groundbreaking coverage of Vietnam led to the conception that the media affected the outcome of the war. Media held power over the thoughts of Americans. The media cannot tell the public what to think, but it can tell them what to think
about. The media coverage of Vietnam played a significant role in that eventual failure.

Photographs are a visual depiction of life. A photo captures a fraction of a second in time, or the “decisive moment.” In this context, John Berger and Jean Mohr observe: “With the invention of photography, we acquired a new means of expression more closely associated with memory than any other” (89). Photography is an effective vehicle for reporting news because it is presumed that photographs represent reality. In theory, a photograph represents exact truth but in reality, what is not depicted in a single negative could be the actual truth. Memories are the “residue” of continuous experience whereas a photograph isolates an instance and does not allow for the understanding of events that are not recorded in the frame. According to Caroline Brothers, photographs are not evidences of history, showing incontrovertible proof, but rather they are indications of the circumstances in which they were shot (17). She means that a photograph, like any other text, must be read in the context in which it is framed or constructed.

News photographs add greatly to the impact of words in print media, contributing to the significant role the media played in the Vietnam War. Photojournalism can be understood through the standard themes of editorial photos. There are four categories in the hierarchy of editorial photographs: informational, graphically appealing, emotionally appealing, and intimate. Photojournalists are aware of their potential shock value of what falls into
their viewfinder, and it is that shock value for which they strive. There are five effects of visual images: easy recall ability, ability to become an icon, aesthetic impact, emotional power, and potentially significant political impact. All these aspects are prevalent in the works of great photojournalists.

The Vietnam War was a turning point for photojournalism. It was the first war in which the outcome was not determined on the battlefield but in the media. According to Brothers, photographs of the Vietnam War “influenced public attitudes to the hostilities” (1). She means that the war photographs influenced construction of opinions about war.

Photographs are a valuable source of information in the media because visual images are recalled more quickly and for a longer time than words. Photos are significant based on the viewer’s learning styles and how the photos resonate with the individual viewer. High visualizers are able to store information about individual news photographs, recognize news photographs as more complex than the written word, and find photographs more appealing than print reports. Images have the ability to trigger people’s pre-existing values, cognitions and feelings.

Nick Ut’s Accidental Napalm photograph is the defining image of the Vietnam War because that little girl will not go away, despite many attempts at forgetting, and it confronts the U.S. citizens with the immorality of the war. It is a haunting iconic image. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites define iconic images as those recognized by everyone and understood as
representations of historically significant events; they activate strong emotional responses, and they are regularly reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics (173). Iconic photos also can motivate public action on behalf of democratic values. In this regard, Michael Griffin observes that the “great pictures” typically symbolize national valor, human courage, inconceivable inhumanity, or senseless loss (131). He suggests that iconic photographs help to construct and market nationalisms or humanisms.

The iconic images are created and kept in circulation by “discourse elites”: prominent people in politics, media, and academy, from presidents to anchor people. The many qualities of an iconic image includes celebrity (a famous image that people can identify when prompted), prominence (how prominent a photo’s appearance is in the media), frequency (how often a photo appears in the media, measured quantitatively), profit (the icon’s value as a commodity), instantaneousness (how quickly an image achieves fame), transposability (reuse across multiple media outlets), fame of subjects (recognizability or notoriety of the photo’s subjects), importance of event (when an icon is tied to a significant social or historical event), metonymy (when a photo of a single event is used to exemplify general conditions), primordial and/or cultural resonance (when an icon alludes to a biblical or classical historical scene), and striking composition (when a photo contains superior compositional or visual elements or depicts ‘the decisive moment’). An icon provokes a strong negative reaction or outrage.
The five iconic photos of the Vietnam War era used in this study include John Paul Filo’s “Kent State” (1970), Malcolm Brown’s “Self-Immolation” (1963), Eddie Adams’s “Tet Execution” (1968), Ronald Haeberle’s “My Lai Massacre” (1968) and Nick Ut’s “Accidental Napalm” (1972). All these photos represent depictions of horror, challenge ideological narratives, and have acquired far greater currency than any video footage of the war. The photos acquired iconic status by shocking the American public and creating widespread disillusionment over the United States’ role in the war.
The Kent State Massacre occurred on May 4, 1970, when soldiers of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on students who were protesting the Vietnam War. Thirteen students were shot, killing four. Student photographer John Filo took a photo of a girl screaming out over a body lying on the pavement and the photo went out on the AP wire later that day. That photo became an iconic photo of the Kent State Massacre and the Vietnam War.

The Kent State photo is iconic because it is has a celebrity quality; this means that people recognize the photo instantaneously and it achieves fame as it portrays a significant historical event. The subject of the photo is not famous, and therefore it does not fit into the category of fame: only a handful of people alive today could identify the woman kneeling over the body. The Kent State photo has been studied excessively by scholars, resulting in the findings that much of the power of the photo comes from the expression of outrage on the woman’s face. In this context, Hariman and Lucaites observes: “The girl’s cry is a direct demand for accountability and compensatory action” (9). The feeling on her face is powerful not only because of its expressiveness but also because it matches the political situation represented by the photograph. The woman draws attention onto herself, away from the boy who is lying in front of her, presumably dead, with her intense emotional response. In No Caption Needed, Hariman and Lucaites remark: “Her scream seems to be ripping out of her heart, spontaneous, uninhibited, and unanswerable- almost if she had been the one shot” (140-41). The authors
also believe that the photo has become an icon for the event because the photo is gendered. A woman is a more appropriate vessel for a public emotional response. The woman is positioned between two males, the one lying motionless on the ground and the one standing beside her, seemingly unmoved. Hariman and Lucaites also point out that the Kent State girl acts as a ventriloquist for the murdered body on the pavement. According to Angie Lovelace, the anguish in the woman’s face is catapulted to a national level because of the anonymity of the body lying face down in the foreground of the photo (38). The anonymity of the boy killed in the massacre only increased the public opinion mounting against the war. One of the less than praising aspects of the photo is that it is technically poor; it violates the techniques of photography because a fence post grows out of the woman’s head. This compositional error prevents it from falling into the striking composition category as a quality of an iconic photo.

**Self-Immolation**
The “Burning Monk” photograph was taken by Malcolm Browne on June 11, 1963, when Thich Quang Duc sat down in a busy Saigon intersection and set fire to himself in protest against the South Vietnamese government. A march of 300 Buddhist monks and nuns blocked all entrances to the intersection while fellow monks poured a combustible mixture on Thich Quang Duc. He struck a match and was instantaneously engulfed in flames. This photograph was one of the first ones to introduce Americans to the conflict in Vietnam and its undeniable force transfixed the attention of the American public on the dramatic events portrayed.

This photo exemplifies to the emotional reactions that iconic images incite. Typically, the picture is annotated as one that occasioned a reaction of shock and dismay. When he saw the photo for the first time, President Kennedy’s reaction was undoubtedly similar to that of many others. He was heard to exclaim “Jesus Christ,” when the morning papers were delivered to him. According to Hariman and Lucaites, the photo indicated that the Saigon government was so powerless that it could not put out the flames as the body burned (56). It points to the indifference and apathy inherent in a powerless government.

Tet Execution
The Tet Execution photograph captured the precise moment when a Viet Cong prisoner was executed at point-blank range. On 1 February, 1968, Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, chief of the South Vietnamese National Police, shot the prisoner with a small Smith & Wesson detective pistol in front of AP photographer Eddie Adams as well as NBC and ABC camera crews. The execution was aired on television, but it was the still photograph that captured the “decisive moment.” This photo acquired far greater currency than the video footage of the event. The photograph highlights the facial expressions; it circulates more easily due to the tangible nature of a photograph. It is in sharp contrast to the network broadcast of the event. Moreover, the video footage of the events is actually more chaotic and horrific. The photo won the Pulitzer Prize for spot news photography in 1969.
Eddie Adams’s still photo appeared on the front page of most of the major newspapers; it was reprinted ad infinitum in magazines and books. The photo’s prominence in the media yielded the credit of changing the course of history. In his *Time* magazine eulogy for General Loan, Eddie Adams commented: “Still photographs are the most powerful weapons in the world” (17). Adams was tormented by the ramifications of his photograph. He stated: “The general killed the Viet Cong; I killed the general with my camera” (17). In the article, Adams also mentioned that photographs can lie even if they are not manipulated. His photograph could not depict the good that the general accomplished during the war and it could not explain the circumstances in which the general pulled the trigger.

The photo has a striking composition because it shows the two subjects with the gun in the center. Its simplicity is crucial. The war depicted in this photograph is man against man, not the complex war of bombs and unseen enemies. The photo became famous for its depiction of the indiscriminate brutality of the war. The executioner’s businesslike manner and lack of emotion indicate that this situation is routine. And the Viet Cong’s expression of the unknown creates an empathy with the viewers.

**My Lai Massacre**
On March 16, 1968, the men of Charlie Company under the command of First Lieutenant William Calley expected to find the Viet Cong. They found no enemy soldiers, only old men, women and children; but they still killed them all in what would later be referred to as the My Lai Massacre. Army photographer Ronald Haeberle accompanied the troops to My Lai that day and turned in a few black-and-white self-censored photographs of the infantrymen and Vietnamese huts. However, on his personal color film camera, he took photos of the atrocities and murders that occurred that day. Eight months later, on November 20, Haeberle gave the exclusive rights to the photos to The Cleveland Plain Dealer and an unusually large photo of a tangle of bodies, of clearly women and children, was printed at the top of the front page. The photos were later
reproduced in newspapers and magazines around the world. The photo became known as “And Babies?” and was used as evidence during the court proceedings that resulted in the conviction of Calley.

This photograph acquired iconic status by shocking the American public and creating widespread disillusionment over the U.S. role in the war. It depicts terror and American atrocities in intimate details. The “And Babies?” photograph got loose in the culture as an easily recognized symbol of what was wrong with America.

**Accidental Napalm**
The Accidental Napalm photo was taken by Associated Press photographer Nick Ut on 8 June 1972, near Trang Bang in South Vietnam. The photo shows children fleeing in terror, with the focus on nine-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc, in the center, who ripped off her burning clothes after she was splashed by napalm. There was a brief editorial debate about whether to print a photo involving nudity, but it was subsequently published all over the world the next day. In this regard, Hariman and Lucaites comment: “The photo violates one set of norms in order to activate another; propriety is set aside for a moral purpose. It is a picture that shouldn’t be shown of an event that shouldn’t have happened” (41). The young, female, naked figure represents the victimized, feminized country of Vietnam. Her nudity represents her innocence, an innocence that was taken from her by the war.

There is a stark contrast between the soldiers and the children: the soldiers’ business-as-usual attitude contrasts with the girl’s pain and terror. The soldiers show that this seemingly rare event is not all that uncommon. The soldiers are supposed to protect the children, but they merely herd them down the road. This photo ignites a strong emotional response. The dramatic charge of the photo comes from its evocation of pity and terror. Pain is the central frame of the photo. The photograph projects her pain into the world. The child that is closest to the camera, in the foreground, also has a look of terror on his face. This photo is one of the most famous images of the
Vietnam War and among one of the most widely recognized photographs in American photojournalism.

The purpose of war photography has shifted throughout the years. During earlier wars photos were purely used to inform the public. Images were sent back to keep the public updated on what their troops were doing. In contrast, recent war photography, due to censorship and embedding, has become nothing more than propaganda. Staged and altered shots are created in order to show the military in a positive light, thereby limiting the offence they create to the viewing public.

The Vietnam War is known as the war that was lost on TV. The media was allowed to publish all kinds of images. During Vietnam the press was given remarkable freedom to report the war without any government control. Vietnam was the most heavily covered war in which reporters were not subject to extensive censorship. Pictures of decapitated bodies and civilian injuries were broadcast back in America causing the public to think twice about the war that was taking place.

The severity of the images was one of many factors that contributed to the American government losing the will to fight on in the war. Many journalists generally reported what they saw both positive and negative. The freedom they were given was interpreted in several different ways, with the majority reporting the war in a completely subjective way. It was the journalists’ views that prevailed with the public, whose disenchantment
forced an end to American involvement. The general stance on reporting the war started to change as the war progressed. The longer the conflict continued, the more graphic the images and reports were. The offensive and disturbing reports from Vietnam as well as conscription and the fatality rate led to many people staging an antiwar protest and voicing their concerns about the war. The largest of the response was at Washington DC when a reported two hundred and fifty thousand people gathered in joint protest. As a response to what happened in Vietnam, the censorship put on the press by the British government during the Falklands war was at an extreme. Every inch of columns and pictures had to be checked thoroughly by army officials before it was passed onto the Ministry of Defence, who then proceeded to check it again before it could be published. The censorship in the Falklands was so extreme that it led to the word "censored" actually being censored. On account of the negative press that was created throughout Vietnam, the British government made a deliberate attempt to stop people knowing what was going on. The government was keen to project a positive picture to the British public and government did this by starving the press of any influential information. The military ensured that the news was delayed in reaching the reporters present. All reporters were also kept at arm’s length and any live footage sent back to Britain was shot from a few hundred metres away.

Images such as those by Rosenthal and Ut remain embedded in our collective consciousness because they are often repeated and recollected in
our visual culture. When we speak of patriotism and sacrifice, or of the “good war,” the Iwo Jima flag raising image always come to the forefront of our common discourse. When we speak of atrocities and failed U.S. foreign policy, we refer to the incident at Trang Bang, Vietnam, where a little girl changed nations forever.